



Executive Memorandum

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ESTABLISHING THE NATIONAL PRIORITY ON MISSILE DEFENSE

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Within the next few weeks, President-elect George W. Bush will have three excellent opportunities to turn his campaign commitment to protect Americans from ballistic missile attack into a national priority: the Inaugural Address on January 20; the State of the Union address, if he decides to give one, on January 23; and the formal presentation of his budget for fiscal year (FY) 2002 in February.

In each of these very different forums, President Bush should explain to Americans, Congress, and the world why a national missile defense system is urgently needed and how a global missile defense system will help to ensure that no country is held hostage by the threat of attack by missiles carrying nuclear, chemical, or biological warheads. Even today, the devastation that one of these missiles can inflict—whether it is launched by accident or intentionally by a rogue leader, terrorist, or madman—is unimaginable.

The Cold War mentality that merely a threat of retaliation was enough to keep those who possessed these weapons from using them is strategically as outdated as the Soviet Union is defunct. As Congress demonstrated by enacting the National Missile Defense Act of 1999, the threat of attack is clear, present, and growing as rogue states and Third World countries gain access to these weapons and the means to deliver them. President Bush

should waste no time in declaring that the deployment of missile defense is a national priority.

Establishing Presidential Leadership. The Inaugural Address will allow President Bush to assure Americans and America's allies that he intends to stand by his campaign commitment to field a national missile defense system as soon as technologically possible. Rather than discuss particular programs and details, this address is a time to talk about broad themes—most especially, how he views America's proper role in the world.

As the leader of the free world and Commander in Chief of the world's foremost military force, President Bush must demonstrate the courage and will to commit America's resources to fighting terrorism in any form. But it is impossible for America to lead the world if its own territory and that of its friends and allies remain forever vulnerable to ballistic missiles. Vulnerability is not a virtue;

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it is rooted in uncertainty and fear, not leadership and strength. It makes hostages of people who trust their government to protect them by “provid[ing] for the common defence.” In today’s world, with proliferating missiles and weapons of mass destruction, terrorists who do not fear death, and rogue leaders who starve their countrymen to own these weapons, missile defense is unquestionably necessary. It is also possible. President Bush must explain these core principles.

Establishing the Legislative Agenda. The State of the Union Address is given before a joint session of Congress that is broadcast on television. As the new President, he could choose not to give this address this year, but that would be a mistake. The “State of the Union” is that America is undefended and vulnerable to attack. This address will enable him to explain his plan to end this incomprehensible condition, to present the legislative agenda required to achieve it, and to request the full support of the American people to ensure that it becomes reality in the near term. President Bush should make it clear that missile defense is not just one of many items in his legislative agenda, but the highest national security priority.

President Bush should begin his speech—and signal his desire to cooperate with Congress—by emphasizing the historic step the 106th Congress took in enacting the National Missile Defense Act of 1999, making the political decision to deploy national missile defense the law of the land. He should stress that he will honor that commitment to the people of America and implement the law to the best of his ability. He should also emphasize that America’s security depends on Congress’s willingness to authorize and appropriate the funds necessary to fulfill the letter of the law.

Specifically, President Bush should announce that he will make the important decision about the system’s design (or architecture) this spring and that he will seek funding for a full array of missile defense research and development programs to preserve the nation’s options for deploying an effective defense that includes sea-based, space-based, and ground-based systems. President Bush must also explain the need to develop boost-phase intercept capabilities to limit the destruction ballistic missiles

can inflict. Beyond these points, specific programmatic descriptions are not necessary in this speech.

Establishing Executive Branch Action Items. The primary audience for the President’s initial budget presentation in February is not Congress; it is the federal bureaucracy. In Washington, the budget drives policy. The President may request and receive robust funding levels for programs he supports, but the bureaucracy must defend those programs before Congress and the American people and implement them.

In his budget presentation, President Bush should first reiterate his intention to fulfill his obligation under the law to field a national missile defense “as soon as is technologically possible” and to ensure that the program is not delayed by funding constraints. To do this, he will need to dedicate roughly \$8 billion to missile defense research, development, testing, construction, and deployment activities in FY 2002. (His budget should also include a supplemental funding provision of roughly \$1 billion for these programs in FY 2001.)

Conclusion. As many American Presidents have shown, presidential leadership begins with effective rhetoric. It is reinforced by robust funding requests. Together, these public presentations start the process of turning campaign promises into reality.

Managing a successful missile defense program will require President Bush to demonstrate his commitment to the program at home and abroad. Rogue leaders, hostile states, and terrorists will find little incentive to invest in weapons of mass destruction if those expensive assets are likely to be destroyed over their own country shortly after lift-off. To sustain a vibrant missile defense program over the long term, the President will need to reaffirm his support for missile defense in his Inaugural Address, establish a legislative agenda to achieve it in a State of the Union Address, and translate missile defense policy into programmatic recommendations when he presents his budget to Congress.

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